

As the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID -19) continues to spread, our hearts reach out to the many across the globe who have been affected by this disease. Many have paid with their lives, and many more are dealing with the infection and symptoms, have lost their loved ones or worried for them, are losing their income, losing their freedoms, and living in fear of the disease and its impact. A disproportionately larger number of individuals, however, are living in fear and experiencing the pain of rising instances of xenophobia and racism.

Historically, infectious disease has generated racist discourse that blames victim populations for the perceived threat. Such discourse is not only distasteful but has major consequences by giving free rein to racist, discriminatory behaviors and justifying political responses that threaten human rights. In recent history, we saw a similar wave of xenophobia during the SARS outbreak in 2003, during the h1n1 swine flu outbreak in 2009, and Ebola outbreak in 2014 to name a few.

The responses to this outbreak of the COVID-19 has been no different. We are hearing about incidents in which the virus is referred to as the "Chinese" virus, the yellow peril, and those who appear to be of Asian descent and students who wear masks for various reasons are being stigmatized, subjected to racist and/or xenophobic jokes and remarks, and excluded by those fearful of contracting the virus. Many of our international and domestic students, staff, and faculty with loved ones abroad are concerned about families. There are fears around the ability to return home due to travel bans. In this already stressful time they also might end up facing painful discrimination that can result in physical, emotional, and economic consequences for them. These developments are causing harm to many on our campuses and add to the stress already present in our competitive academic environments.

We at AUCCCO wanted to offer our condolences, express our concerns, and to encourage our community to stand strong together against prejudice and racism during the time of ever-evolving public health emergency. Here are some suggestions on what your center might consider doing:

About the illness itself and minimizing the bias-based harm to students:

1. Name the general fear and anxiety about the condition and dispel the myths and misinformation through accurate and updated information offered by CDC.
2. Acknowledge the impact of confusion, uncertainty, fear, and panic experienced as a result of conflicting "facts" coming from various official sources.
3. Educate ourselves and our communities about the real risks of the virus and the basic steps to be taken to protect ourselves (including steps to manage anxiety by limiting contact with news, internet, and social media coverages with sensationalizing pictures and headlines).
4. Moving away from the focus on travel to China as the condition has spread to other countries and are impacting many more people directly and indirectly.
5. Help our campus communities find ways to address anxieties proactively, and discourage xenophobia and encourage inclusion.
6. Offer strategies to check our own and others biased words and actions.

Support for the impacted student communities:

1. Put up a statement of support for the impacted communities.
2. Reach out to the communities affected by the virus, and by the racism, microaggressions, and bias on campus.
3. Offer skills to cope with and respond to such attacks.
4. Offer spaces to lead conversations or facilitate discussions for those who want to talk during this difficult time.

Responses by university campuses:

1. Urge the institution to develop a plan in case of the spread of the illness on your campus.
2. Think creatively and be flexible in ways to provide mental health support, such as phone check-ins, tele-therapy, and policies around staff working remotely if needed.
3. Encourage academic departments and faculty members to increase support and honor students with signs of the illness when they choose to stay home to protect self and the community (academic policy around missed classes/assignments in order to prevent the spread of the illness).